



Who's Protecting Our Kids?

by Risé Wampler

Risé Wampler is Sub-Regional Vice President of Central West One which includes the counties of Butts, Carroll, Coweta, Fayette, Harris, Heard, Henry, Lamar, Meriwether, Newton, Pike, Spalding, Talbot, Troup and Upson. She is also President of Henry County Adoptive and Foster Parent Association and Foster Mother of four.

When the Editor asked me to write this article, I was completely without thought. Me? Write an article for the newsletter. What, in heaven's name would I have to write about, that any one would want to read? I had no idea until a few days ago, when my 7 year old foster son showed me exactly what I needed to say.

I was sitting in my living room (looking at it and sighing at the thought of cleaning up one more time after hurricane Andrew) but instead playing Nintendo with my 7 year old. He looked at me and said, "Thanks mommy!" When I asked what for, his reply caught me completely off guard. "Thank you for playing with me, instead of straightening the house. This has been the funnest day."

My eyes filled with tears when I realized that he had said the world in that one sentence. For months I have been wrapped up in getting my life organized, so that I could take over my new position as Sub-Regional VP, and in the process I had forgotten the most important reason for my running - THE KIDS!

I am a third generation foster parent and I have been in this for 3 1/2 years now. In that time I have seen alot, most of which has made me mad. I have watched as the courts and the laws have seemed to forget exactly who they are supposed to be protecting. I have watched as countless lives have been turned upside down and hurt again.

I can not claim to have all the answers, in fact I may not have any of the answers, but this one thing I do know, we are the one's that live with these kids 24/7, we are the ones that live with the after effects of the abuse and neglect. We are the ones that sacrifice and watch over these kids. We are the ones that love these kids and, in some cases, advocate for these kids. I therefore believe that we should be a part of the solution. We need to stand up and be counted, not as people who are in this for the money, or the popularity (HA! HA!), but as people who care and want to see things changed for the better for "our" kids.

Most of "our" kids get lost in an over burdened, over worked, under paid system. I have watched so many slip through the cracks, I have seen too many returned home before the family was ready and I have seen these same kids hurt again. Often we can't save them the second time around.

I have seen many foster parents give up and quit because things are so rough. Believe me I know how rough things are. My husband and I have been through the wringer, we have been court ordered to allow the birth parents to come into our home to be taught the right way to parent. We have been court ordered to

family therapy with the birth family. At times we have wanted to quit, in fact I have picked up the phone countless time to resign, then at that precise moment one of the kids comes in and says that one thing that reminds me of why I do this anyway. It has nothing to do with the fact that things are hard or because I don't see eye to eye with my caseworker. It has nothing to do with the fact that I get mad at the laws and at the courts. It does, however have everything to do with saving that one child. Or having a positive effect on that one little life.

When will things get better? When will the laws change to protect these defenseless little ones? Only when we as citizens stand up and voice our opinions and cause a few ripples to rock the boats of indifference.

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No one even notices foster care until a child dies. Why should a little child lose a life before someone tries to make things better. I want to change things now, while there is still time, while I can make a difference..The problem is that the children have no rights in the eyes of the law. The Constitution that our country was founded upon gives every citizen certain rights. There was no age limit placed on these rights many years ago, so why do we place one on them now?

Don't these children have a right to a warm bed, plenty to eat and drink and clothes to cover them? Don't they have the right not to be broken or hurt and not to be left alone or neglected?

These are rights, not privileges! America stands on the principles that "ALL MEN ARE CREATED EQUAL AND ARE ENDOWED BY THEIR CREATOR WITH CERTAIN UNALIENABLE RIGHTS. AMONG THESE ARE LIFE, LIBERTY AND THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS."

Our children deserve the same rights that these parents so loudly demand. We can give these kids a brighter tomorrow and a safer today. Remember, these kids are our future. They will be tomorrow's American citizens. Will it be an America we can be proud of?

I'm looking forward to serving each one of you in my sub region. I hope to meet you all. Please notify me of your meetings, I'd like to be a part of at least one from each county. If you have friends that aren't member of the association but would like to be, please have them notify me. The larger our voice the better we will be heard. Thank you for this opportunity I hope I will be all that you want in a Sub Regional Vice President.

Yours for the kids, Risé Wampler

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